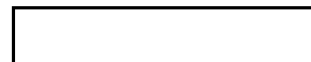
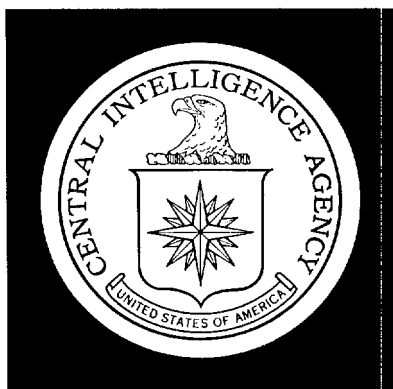


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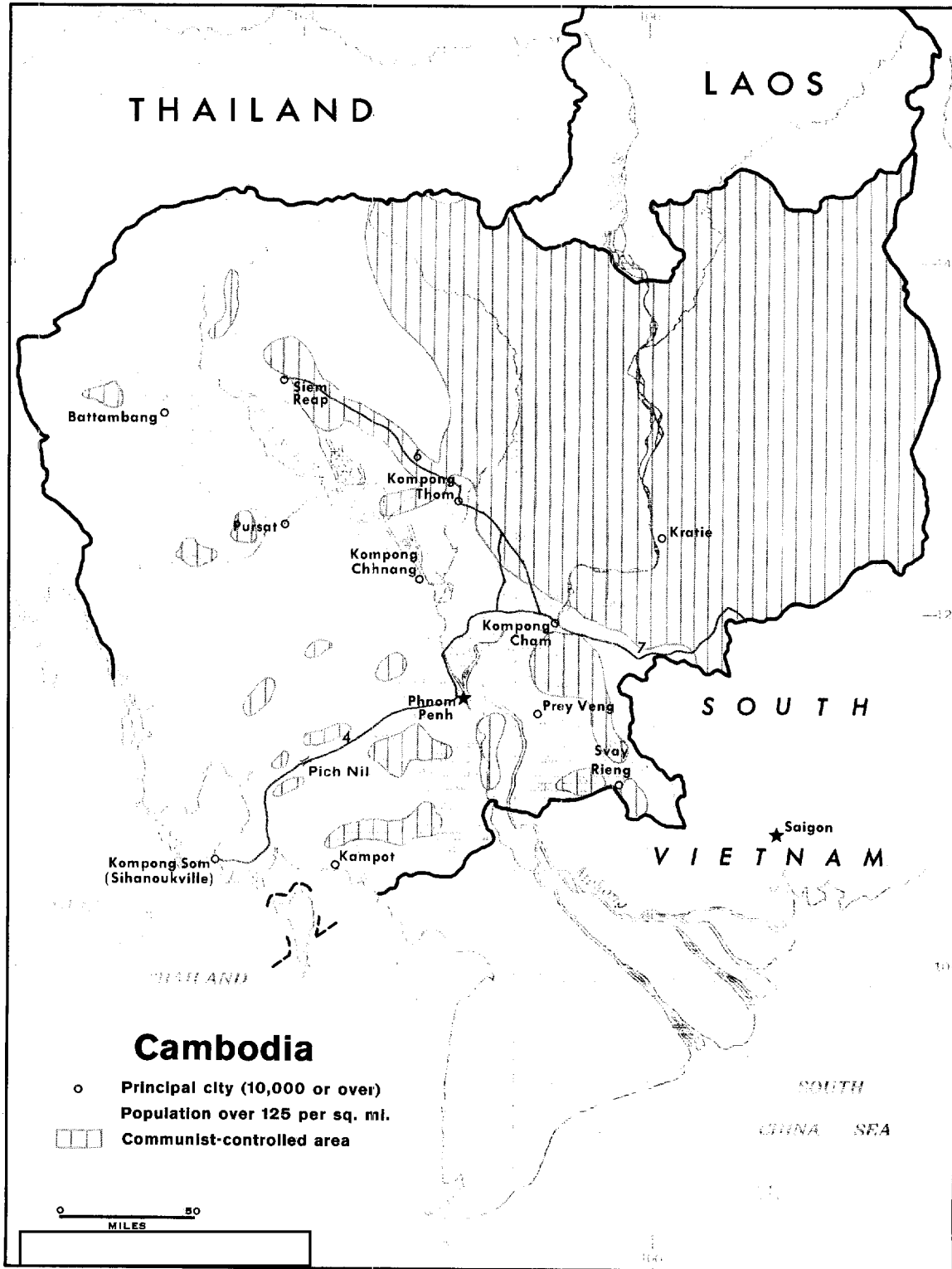
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Current Situation



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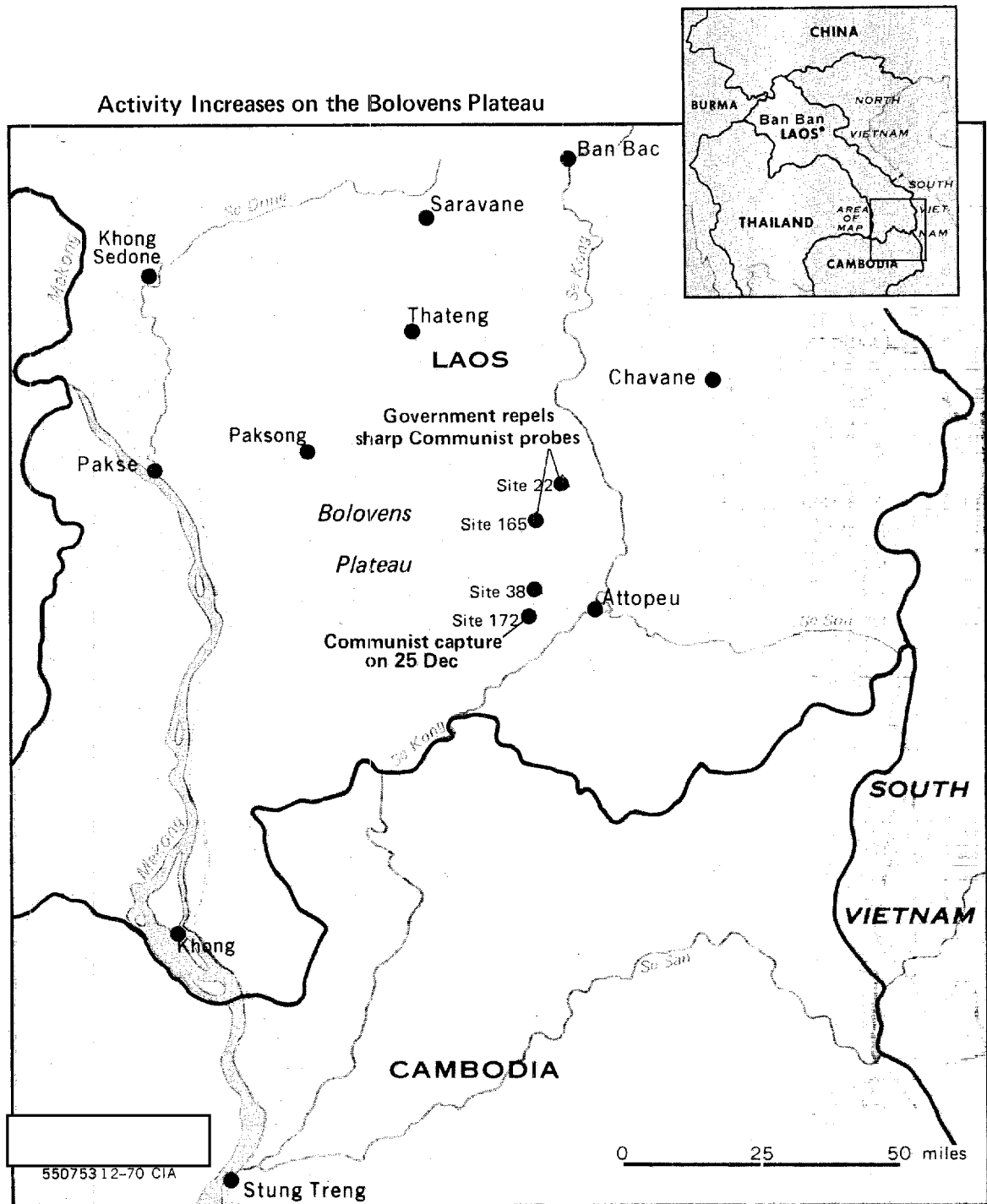
CAMBODIA: Communist forces struck a major urban area and also continue to harass government positions along the principal roadways.

Kompong Cham city was hit by another 122-mm. long-range rocket attack on 23 December, and the enemy probed several government positions in the area. Almost a score of civilians were killed or wounded in these attacks, marking one of the heaviest harassments of a major urban area in recent weeks. The Communists also continued to shell Cambodian positions along Routes 6 and 7, but the government casualties were light.

Meanwhile, the Cambodians have asked that ARVN forces be made available for clearing operations along Route 4 linking Phnom Penh with the seaport of Kompong Som (Sihanoukville). The road has been closed since late November, and desultory Cambodian efforts to clear the Communists from the Pich Nil pass and other strongholds near the road have made no progress.

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- Communist-held location
- Government-held location

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LAOS: Fighting flared on the Bolovens Plateau this weekend but the military situation was quiet elsewhere.

Two battalions of government irregulars were forced to withdraw from the Site 172 area on the southeastern rim of the Bolovens Plateau on 25 December by what government commanders described as two battalions of North Vietnamese troops. Casualties among the irregulars were very light. Sharp Communist probes were repulsed at Site 165 and at Site 22, the last major government base in the eastern portion of the plateau. Some minor skirmishing was also reported in the northern reaches of the plateau, but no elements of the NVA 9th Regiment, which deployed into the area several weeks ago, have yet swung into action against the irregular battalions that have been operating south of the Communist-held village of Thateng.

The Communists so far have been thwarted in their efforts to gain control of the Bolovens in order to open a major westerly infiltration route into Cambodia. A more concerted drive to take at least the eastern portion of the plateau is still a good possibility. At a minimum, continuing Communist pressure on the Bolovens makes it difficult for the government to use its positions there to launch intelligence operations or harassing raids eastward into the main Communist infiltration corridor.

In north Laos, there has been no significant change in the tactical situation near the Plaine des Jarres. The government operation targeted against the Ban Ban valley continues to make little progress, although government troops managed to destroy a 100-ton rice cache and some ammunition east of the valley. The slow going still appears to be a consequence of bad weather and other factors rather than stiffened enemy resistance. The Communists evidently continue to rely on North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao troops already in the Ban Ban area to parry the government drive.

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INDIA: Mrs. Gandhi's decision to call early national elections was taken only after a thorough examination of the alternatives.

Among the major factors favoring an early poll--elections were not required until 1972--are Mrs. Gandhi's and her government's assumed popularity throughout India and uncertainty over the trend of the economy in the year ahead. Additionally, the major opposition parties in parliament have yet to work out a "grand alliance" to oppose the Ruling Congress Party but efforts in this direction might well be successful within another year.

Indicative of the trend toward more effective collaboration among her opponents, at least at the state level, was the installation on 22 December of a coalition government opposed to the Ruling Congress in the state of Bihar. The new government replaced a weak coalition led by the Ruling Congress, which had fallen on 18 December. A similar opposition coalition was installed in the prime minister's home state of Uttar Pradesh in October. Thus, Mrs. Gandhi faces national elections with opposition coalitions presently in control of India's two most populous states.

To achieve an absolute majority in the lower house, the Ruling Congress will need to capture at least 262 of the 523 seats--520 elected and three appointed by the President. Presently, Mrs. Gandhi's party has 222 representatives in the lower house and in order to ensure a majority on major issues has been forced to rely on the support of independents, a regional party, some socialists, and the pro-Soviet Communist Party of India.

In the coming campaign, Mrs. Gandhi, both because of her ideological bent and the popular appeal

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of her government's "progressive" image, can be expected to emphasize her party's devotion to socialist measures at home and to India's traditional nonalignment policy abroad. The right-of-center opposition, in turn, can be expected to counter with allegations that the prime minister has demonstrated dictatorial tendencies at home and a weakness, bordering on subservience, in her dealings with the Soviet Union.

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NOTE

USSR-CUBA: The Soviet guided-missile frigate and naval oiler that left Cienfuegos late last week have entered the Atlantic through the Windward Passage east of Cuba. The two ships are currently northeast of the Dominican Republic and are headed east. Yesterday, an F-class diesel submarine and a submarine tender were also sighted leaving Cienfuegos; the rescue tug and the two nuclear submarine support barges remain there. The tender and tug have been in the Cuban area since early September.

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